

Underneath

the

Wild

Garden

Waits

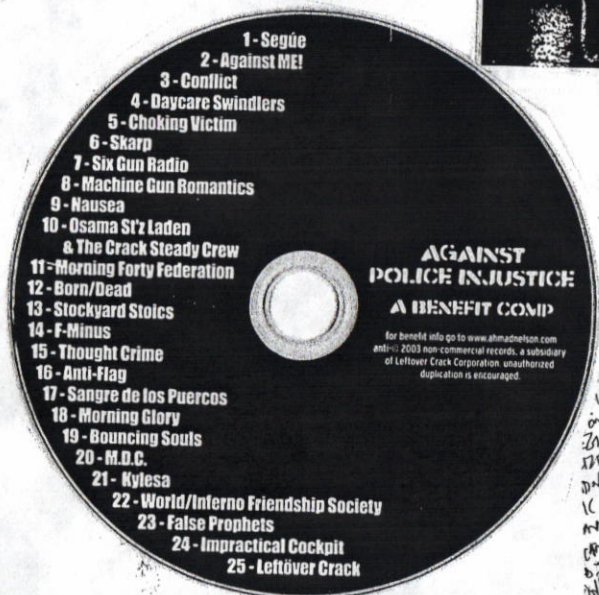
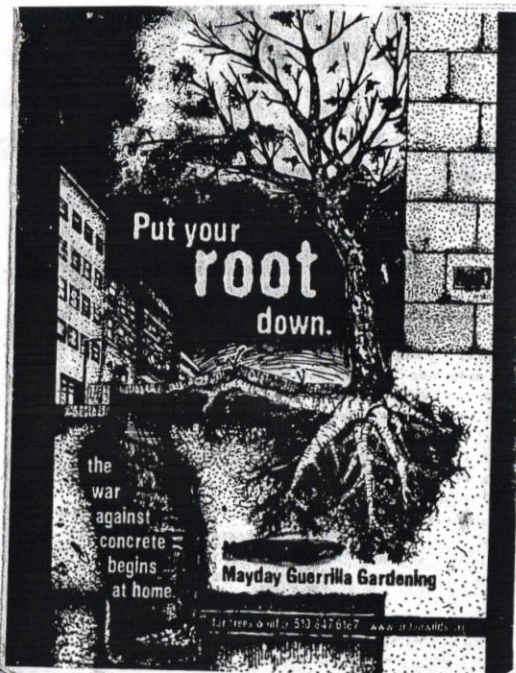
to

Grow

BY SASCHA SCATTER



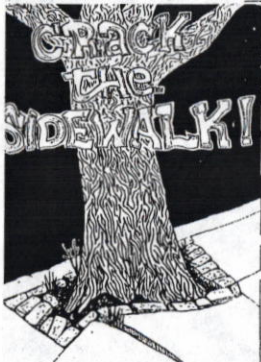
FOOD NOT LAWS!



SEE HIM, SEE HER...

THE NEW YORK TIMES, TUESDAY, MAY 6, 2003

World's Farmers Sowed Languages as Well as Seeds



THANKS FOR READING!
ASCHA
SECRET PROPS TO KETCHUP
FOR TEACHING ME
THE CODE & KICKIN IT
ME UNDER THE

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P.S. Theme Music for the Revolution

In case you're interested, this column was mostly knocked out on a Saturday afternoon in the shade of my room in the barn while listening over and over again to this CD comp called "Against Police Injustice" that was just put out by my old buddy Scott Sturgeon. A couple of you have known me long enough to remember that when I was a teenager I played bass in a local NYC squatter band called Choking Victim. That was a ridiculously long time ago and I have gone on to a strange but fulfilling life that has nothing to do with the Exciting World of Rock. Meanwhile my old band mate Sturgeon stuck with it, kept making music and managed to get our old band signed to Epitaph Records and to this day is still touring all over the world with his new group Leftover Crack. Anyway, after eight years of not playing together or even really running into each other much on the road, we started hanging out a bit and last Fall he actually ask me to go record a bunch of songs with him in Los Angeles in a fancy recording studio. Which was too bizarre of an offer to refuse. So I did and one of those songs we recorded last December is on the comp (and very catchy song I might add) as well as an old CV song we recorded back in 1994. But the comp is so fucking awesome: there are all these great old classic songs from Nausea and Conflict and the False Prophets and MDC and Anti-Flag and the Bouncing Souls and they're all mixed really well together. And it even has that instant hit "Baby, I'm an Anarchist" by that great Floridian band Against Me!. I'm just thoroughly impressed with the thing and proud to be a little part of it. And I really like the way my old friend has managed to take his experience working in the music industry and is using it to do badass DIY projects. And it's a benefit for this prisoner Ahmad Nelson in Louisiana and all proceeds go to his legal fees. If you want to order one I think its 10 bucks and you can get the info at: www.ahmadnelson.com. Okay, that's it.

When I arrived at the farm in February I sowed a flat of the seeds and left them on the heating pad to germinate, they were the first seeds I sowed. About a month later I sat alone in the greenhouse transplanting the little seedlings from their crowded, thickly sown rows into their own individual plugs, talking to each one of them and welcoming them into the world as the snow came down in sheets outside. At the time I thought about what the journey must have been like for these seeds: descended all the way from a weedy plant in the Andes of Peru somewhere grown in indigenous wild gardens ten thousand years ago, brought to Europe and spread all over the world -- eventually making it back to the Americas, ending up in some hippie plant breeder genius' garden in the Pacific Northwest, and finally reincarnated for another Spring in a greenhouse in New York by some crazy punk kid who was talking to them! What a long strange trip by anyone's standards. When I transplanted them in the field three months later, maybe it was my imagination, but I swore I could feel Mushroom's spirit around smiling and approving.

Yesterday I harvested a big handful of the first cayenne peppers off my plants out in the field and cooked them up with dinner and they were so good. They tasted like history and friendship and the future. Working with plants in our gardens allows us the privilege of witnessing and taking part in the life cycle over the course of the growing season and now, as I'm beginning to discover, over the course of our lives. Working with plants reminds us about all the important stuff: sex and life and change and death and the power of creation, learning to keep our history and knowing we can shape it as we go.

Not too many months from now if you write to me, hopefully I'll be able to send you seeds from these same cayenne plants and you'll be able to plant them and grow them in your garden wherever you are. And the story continues...

Happy Summer

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Underneath the Wild Garden Waits to Grow Slug and Lettuce Column Summer 2003

Willy says...

*here's a story that you may not comprehend,
but the parking lots will crack and bloom again.
There's a world beneath the pavement that will never end.
Seeds are lying dormant and will never end.*

Willy says...

*if you listen you can hear the sound of birds,
hear their song above the chaos, hear their words.
Listen to their love songs, it will never end.
If you listen you can hear.
And the old one sits with me above the city
while we watch the madness of the world below.
And she laughs and tells me that it's temporary,
underneath the wild garden waits to grow...*

"Willy says" by Dana Lyons

Guerilla Gardening in the Hudson Valley

These hot Summer nights in the Mid-Hudson Valley, my crew of friends and I wander around the streets of New Paltz planting tomato and squash seedlings wherever we think they'll survive and wherever we know can get away with it. Nestled on the edges of people's irrigated lawns and University fields, we'll be harvesting fruit and inspiring random strangers for the rest of the season. Walking the evening streets with spading forks over our shoulders and dirt covering our hands, garden trowels sticking out of the side loops of our shorts, back pockets full of sunflower and marigold seeds, and flats of seedling plugs under our arms, it's hard not to feel like total badassess. The first cherry tomatoes are almost ripe and we all know it's just as much about inspiration as it is about feeding people. Guerilla Gardening is about reclaiming our public space and capturing people's imaginations, sowing our radical culture of spontaneity and liberation in the face of modern 21st century North American life. As our slogan "Food Not Lawns" implies: it's a healthy mixing of the wild and practical in a world gone psychotically too far over to the structured and useless.

The Secret Life of Open-Pollinated Vegetables

For the past five months I've been working on an organic farm in exchange for a place to stay and food, learning as much as I can and

trying to be helpful with the knowledge and little bits of experience I've gathered in my travels and studies and time spent on other farms. The people I'm working for have given me the opportunity to tend to the seeds, build the raised beds, and plant an entire half acre section alongside the rest of their acres, and it's been a wonder watching it all come together like magic.

We had a really wet spring and now the sun is coming on full force so all the plants are beginning to mature and bear fruit. The Sugarsnap peas have made their way up the fences, bloomed in all their sexy white and pink flowery glory, and are producing like mad. I harvested two big buckets full of ripe pods today for market. We started pulling the first juicy orange carrots and blood red beets out of the ground last week. On my section of the farm I planted seven varieties of carrots alone, all poking their frilly heads out of the ground in proud yet crooked lines (due to my inexperienced clumsiness with the row seeder.) There are two healthy hundred foot beds full of sweet and long leaf basil that we've been harvesting in bunches for pesto. There are many patches of orange and yellow and red and green stemmed chards. There are fifteen different varieties of lettuce that are growing beside each other in a dazzling display of diversity: speckled, blushed, emerald, deep red -- oakleaf, butterhead, romaine, and deer tongue. I've been making these beautiful lettuce salads mixed with mint leaves, bronze fennel, calendula and marigold flowers, cress, golden purslane, and whatever else looks good out in the field. It's a whole different world from the plastic wrapped iceberg lettuce shipped from California I grew up eating as a kid. The crookneck and paddypan summer squash are just starting to come on and sprawl out into the paths with their large spiny leaves. The folks I work for plant a mix of heirloom varieties that taste really good as well as a number of more productive sure-shot hybrid varieties that bear a lot more fruit but don't taste quite so rich because they've been bred for commercial production.

Breaking Down the Fancy Seed Talk

When people talk about "heirloom vegetables" just imagine them like an heirloom anything else: something so good they've been passed down from generation to generation, seeds saved and replanted, preserved and cherished. When people talk about "open-pollinated

which has been doing amazing workshops, cheap art shows, potlucks, punk shows, and dance parties. The folks I hang out with run children's media video projects, do sex education work with teenagers, build puppets, organize farmworkers, play music, run writing groups, and that's just off the top of my head.

I think the night that I finally realized that I'd stumbled into a truly special community of people was when I went to one of the local anarchist houses and sat in a crowded room full of people through a four hour workshop and discussion about sexism in society and within radical communities and I saw friends and strangers take risks and be incredibly honest, pour their hearts out to each other in a really intimate and trusting ways. This is defanately a radical community consciously and vocally working on their interpersonal shit. And they're good people. A couple months ago when I was going through a crisis in my life the folks here I hardly knew took me in and looked after me like family.

So Summer Travelers: if you find yourself on the East Coast heading up to rake blueberries in Maine or visit the Beehive Collective in Machias or Bread and Puppet in Vermont, you should stop through and pay a visit to our little neck of the woods. It's easy hitchhiking and round these parts. The nearest crew-change on the freight line is up in Kingston, and the last stop on the metro north commuter train is Poughkeepsie. The New Paltz dumpsters are plentiful (and if you look closely you'll find cherry tomatoes growing out of the lawns.)

The Mid-Hudson Valley is the edge where the city meets the country -- north of the suburban commuter zone, surrounded by old farms and forest, the Shawangunk ridge and the Catskill Mountains, but close enough to the city influence to mix up a healthy batch of cultural diversity amidst the necessary biological diversity. I'm really happy to start calling it home.

Epilogue

Around Thanksgiving last year I was sitting in a living room in Corvallis, Oregon with Dr. Alan Kapuler (who we all refer to fondly as Mushroom and who everyone in that world knows is the grandfather of the alternative seed saving movement) and his family and he gave me a big handful of the most beautiful and delicious cayenne peppers from his garden. I traveled across the country last winter with them in my truck and they sat in a paper bag in a milk crate the whole way.

community around here and won the election with promises of ~~actually~~ incorporating clean energy practices like solar power and wind energy into the town plans, creating an artificial wetlands to help the local water treatment filter water without toxic chemicals, and using biodiesel fuel in the Department of Public Works trucks.

As we're up on ladders painting in the midday sun, *The Mayor* and I get to talk about everything from Spanish Civil War history to the future of the Anti-Globalization Movement to how we're going to figure out how to slowly turn all the extra lawn space in New Paltz into vegetable gardens, and then set up programs for local kids to work on them and teach the next generation about the importance of sustainable agriculture. Call it a hunch, but I have a feeling that the next four years around these parts is going to be really interesting.

In other news, here in the town of Gardiner, the local public library is seriously considering starting up a seed library project within its walls connected to a bunch of the regional farms and gardens and calling it the Valley Educational Seed Saving Library (VESSL.) More news on this as it develops.

Introducing the budding Mid-Hudson Valley Free State (or A Message From the Local Punk Rock Tourism Board)

Alright, so bust out your road atlas kids, find the Eastern New York section and then look north from New York City. Notice how the Hudson River bisects the City. The area to the east of the Shawangunk Ridge, over the river, and to the West of the next ridge over is known as the Hudson Valley. About two hours up, about half way to the State Capital of Albany, you will find the area we refer to as the Mid-Hudson Valley. Do you see New Paltz, Poughkeepsie, Rosendale, Kingston? These are places where my friends live. Just South of New Paltz is Gardiner. This where I'm writing to you from. I'm happy to report that after five months of living and working here, the official conclusion I've drawn is that this little part of the country **totally rocks.**

There are amazing swimming holes here, creeks and lakes, old railroad lines converted to bicycle trails that connect all our towns, and beautiful forest to explore full of abandoned cement mines and climbing walls. The young activist community I've found cooks Food Not Bombs and does late night stenciling and organizes protests. They have a budding anarcho group, the Mid-Hudson Valley Collective,

vegetables" they are talking about populations of adaptable plants whose seeds can be saved and replanted the following year. Up until pretty recently, most farmers and gardeners saved their own seeds and the plants they grew adapted to the local soil and weather and pests and diseases. When people talk about "F1 hybrids" they're usually referring to the offspring of two distinct varieties of open-pollinated plants whose genetic based has been selected and reduced to be so narrow and sparse that when they're crossed the resulting mix of genes in the new seeds creates a plant that's incredibly productive and very uniform for one season, but whose seeds are all confused and useless for farmers when planted the next season.

If I've lost you with the awkward scientific language, just remember this part: farmers who use hybrid seeds need to buy new seeds every year because they can't save the ones growing in their field. Hybrid technology changed the whole face of the seed industry because it turned seeds from a natural resource and part of the life cycle of a farm into a marketable commodity. Back in the 1970's all the old regional seed companies in this country were bought out by global petro-chemical companies who already owned the fertilizer, herbicide and pesticide factories. In the 1990's the petro-chemical companies merged with the pharmaceutical corporations and now call themselves the Life Science Industry and spend enormous amounts of money trying to figure out how to suck the life out of vegetables and sell them to us as expensive pills and how to genetically engineer their seeds to be dependent on their chemicals. (And they spend just as much money trying to figure out how to convince us that these are really good ideas we can't live without!) The whole thing is such a big disaster it makes my head spin when I think about it too much. So growing open-pollinated and heirloom vegetables, saving their seeds, and then teaching others how to do it is one way of retaining some degree of self-respect and autonomy from these corporate monsters.

Meanwhile back at the farm here there are fifteen hundred heirloom tomato plants in the ground just beginning to ripen, three dozen different varieties with names like Cherokee Purple, Striped German, Yellow Brandywine, Green Zebra, Garden Peach, Golden Jubilee, Orange Banana, Fruity Cherry, and Black Krim. All of them have amazing stories all wrapped up in their genetics about how they

ended up on our farm from all over the world. Polly, the woman I work for, knows them all intimately. They are her vegetable pride and joy.

The People's Republic of Kale

The plants that I'm really the most proud of are the kales and the broccolis. Polly jokingly refers to my section of the farm as the "People's Republic of Kale." I'm growing out twelve different varieties – an incredible display of brassica family diversity: from Black Kale to Purple Peacock Broccoli, Rainbow Lacinato, Walking Stick, Wild Garden Kale, Red Ursa Kale, White Russian, Marrowstem, True Siberian, and Mushroom's Curled Kale Grex. The plants look so different than anything else in the field in their thick and heavy shades of blue and green and red and purple and in their mix of variegated and savoyed and ruffled and smooth leaves. Kale, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, brussel sprouts, collards – they're all originally descended from the lowly cabbage plant that grew on the coasts of Europe, and then were bred all over the world for different characteristics, the diversity of their family teased out through time and skill.

I love this family of plants because they **thrive on diversity**. They have self-incompatibility mechanisms encoded in their design so that they're forced to cross with each other and each new cross between separate varieties creates a rush of genes that makes new healthy combinations. I picture the mix of genes in my field like a huge family that ended up populating all over the world and are now having a big reunion, because even though they're so varied in shape and color, they're still so genetically similar that when I let them go to seed next season they'll cross with each other and what happens next gets to be my little playground.

My friend and teacher Frank Morton out on the West Coast who runs an alternative seed company (the alternative seed companies are like the equivalent of underground record labels or zine distros except their material is truly **live** – it's a pretty amazing little subculture of people) sent me some of his works in progress in the form of little hand-stamped packets of seed and I've been having so much fun growing them out and doing my own selections for the first time after reading about it and watching other people do it for years.

harvesting of strawberries that's the problem obviously, it's how it's practiced.

Domesticated animals have been co-evolving and co-existing with human beings for thousands of years. The whole process of domestication, although abhorrent to purist anarchist ideals, nonetheless exists. I'm not willing to simplistically write off "domestication" as evil because it doesn't fit into my political ideology. Things are so much more complicated. Depending on your perspective there's a blurry distinction between co-evolution and slavery and lots of space in between. It gets all kinds of thoughts spinning in my head about the relationship between the wild and the cultivated and how they seem to be dependent on each other in sustainable systems.

There's something about having the animals around here, happily eating the grass on the pasture and then using their healthy manure to build the compost for the beds, not having to bring in fertilizer from outside the system, it just seems to make sense. Animals provide a lot of food without having to need large machinery to till the land. Where I'm at with it all these days is that there are so many ways to do things, and the way folks are farming here is one. I hope these words in these last two columns will spark a lot of productive discussion for a long time to come.

(Props to a fellow named Max Schnurer who actually took the time to write me a 10 page response (he's a debate teacher at one of the local colleges and just happens to also be a part of the local New Paltz anarcho-crew and punk rock animal rights) and my old vegan friend Kehben Grifter who reminded me about the sacredness of dreams and the power of holding onto our visions.)

Meanwhile, in town....

So since being a farm hand isn't proving to be the most lucrative career, I've been making money painting houses with this great little revolving crew of folks, one of whom is actually the mayor of New Paltz! That's right, the new mayor of New Paltz's (which is a university town of about 13,000 people about 2 hours north of NYC and just down the road from the farm where I live) name is Jason West, he's 26 years old and won the election back in May on the Green Party ticket. Jason is actually part of the whole radical activist

most people I know don't have the resources to be able to afford free range local organic beef of the type that's produced on the farm where work. It is a class issue. Encouraging people to eat more meat is not really the direction I think we need to be heading in.

And there are small scale alternative models out there that don't use animals in their system. I know an amazingly inspiring and visionary farmer in British Columbia named Dan Jason who runs Salt Spring Seed Company and advocates that gardeners take responsibility for growing their own protein in the form of grains and legumes. He grows beautiful amaranth and quinoa and hullless oats and barley and all kinds of interesting and productive grains and has grown hundreds of varieties beans and lentils.

There's also this cat in Willits, California named John Jeavons who wrote a pretty well known book How to Grow More Vegetables which has been translated into a bunch of languages and he's coined this term "Biointensive" gardening (which is similar to the Biodynamic principles we use here at the farm.) Anyway, the guy was a statician before he became a farmer and he figured out that if you were to grow all your own food without animals and maintain your soil fertility over the long term, 80 percent of your land would need to be in compost crops all the time to have the carbon and other organic material necessary to keep building soil for the future.

The big issue of long term sustainability really is fertility of the soil. If we're not going to rely on animals in the future, we as human beings really need to start composting our own shit on a large scale. For thousands of years before chemical-industrial farming, people have used animal manures to maintain their soil fertility.

That being said, I can't help but feel that on some level there is a correlation between the mass domination we practice in our culture over animals and people's domination over other people. We are what we eat after all, and there's no way to avoid the comparison between factory farms and mass human slavery. But if we were to view it another way, we coevolved with the animals the same way we coevolved with the plants. I have to wonder if the factory farm industry is just a manifestation of something gone terribly wrong in the same way that those enormous fields of chemical monoculture strawberries in California are just a product of a shortsighted system that by its nature feeds on the impulse of greed. It's not the raising and

And one healthy kale plant makes tens of thousands of seeds, so watch out Monsanto!

Wild Sex in the Garden

So here's a quick botany lesson for ya: plants reproduce sexually through their flowers. Pretty cool, huh? (I think they originally tried to teach me about this on a blackboard in a fluorescent lit classroom in the Bronx when I was a teenager and I couldn't have been less interested. It wasn't until years later when I actually spending time around plants that I realized how magical they were.) Okay, so the male part of the flower is known as the *stamen* and produces the pollen to fertilize the female part which is known as the *pistil*. The *pistil* has an ovary which eventually develops into a fruit and ovules (egg cells) which develop into the new seeds for the next season. This whole wild sex orgy (which I can't help but notice is going on all around me as I write this!!) is all wrapped up in the story of the bees and other insects because they're the ones going around gathering pollen and nectar and cross-pollinating all the plants with each other. Some plants cross-pollinate through wind blown pollen, but most of them need the insects to help them out. The flowers and the insects actually co-evolved with each other the same way that us humans co-evolved with our food crops (which all started out as weeds before we domesticated them) - one of us couldn't exist without the other, and in the end the whole lot of us - from the tiny bee gathering nectar in my squash patch to that royal idiot sitting in the White House -- are intimately connected. A little scary.

But check this out cause it gets even more amazing: flowering plants can be divided into three categories: most plants have what are known as "perfect flowers," meaning they have both male and female parts in the same flower. (Which I can't help but find pretty interesting language given recent trends in the dialog surrounding gender politics and the fluid and socially constructed nature of sexual identity!) Anyway, peas and beans and tomatoes are all examples of plants with perfect flowers. They are considered to be *self-pollinated* plants. This means they don't actually need other plants to get their groove on with the universe, but a lot of times the bees end up crossing a certain number of them up anyway, just for the sake of fun and diversity. Right, so then there are plants that are considered *dioecious* which means they have separate male and female plants in a

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population. A good example of a *dioecious* plant you might be familiar with is the humble marijuana plant. At a certain stage of development, any given population of pot plants grown from seed will segregate into separate male and females, and before the male plants have time to set pollen and fertilize the females, they are usually pulled out which makes the females produce lots and lots of resin on their buds in a vain attempt to capture any stray pollen which might float by. This keeps the plants from producing seeds and makes their buds grow large and swollen. Not that I actually know anything about this totally illegal agricultural technique. Ahem. Anyway, spinach is a less racy example of a *dioecious* plant.

Okay, so the third type of flowering plants are the *monoecious* ones which have separate male and female flowers together on the same plant. The whole squash family is *monoecious* – cucumbers, zucchinis, pumpkins, melons, and winter squash. If you get a chance to check out a flowering squash plant you'll probably notice that the big yellow flowers all look similar except that the females have an ovary at their base which ends up becoming the squash fruit once it is pollinated by the traveling insects that are carrying pollen from the male flowers.

Alright, so now that you know a little bit about this stuff, do yourself a favor and just go hang out by some flowers for awhile and check out the scene. (I'm sure they won't mind, flowers are pretty exhibitionist in nature. It's part of their evolutionary strategy.) Look at all the little parts, try and figure out which are male and female. What kind of insects land on them? Where do the seeds form? How do they disperse themselves? Even if it's just the dandelions and plantain and dock and mugwort growing out of the cracks in the cement next to your apartment building, it's still happening! Once you begin to realize that the brilliant colors and sexy alluring shapes of flowers are really all about attraction and sex, and we wouldn't be here without them, suddenly the world begins to feel a little less cold and a lot more interesting. And if you want to speed the process along get yourself some flower seeds and start scattering them all over your neighborhood and wait for a little rain.

Holding Onto Our Dreams and Visions

As you may recall, last column I wrote a pretty controversial section entitled "Imaginary Conversations With my Internal Vegan"

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where I said some mighty harsh words about animal rights activists and the urban political tradition I come from being out of touch with reality. I made the argument that it's more violent to support the growing of huge monocrops of genetically engineered soybeans and have them processed into oil and tofu, packaged and shipped all over the place than it is to locally raise your own pigs and slaughter them for fat and meat. I drew a distinction between industrial factory farms and small organic farms with free range animals, and said that in the end it wasn't the individual killing of animals I was against as much as the concentration camp like misery of factory farms and the alienation of people from their food and the cycles of life and death. I made the point that modern commercial farms separate the plants from the animals and that if we want to create a true sustainable agriculture we were going to need animals to help fertilize the land and that my urban vegan comrades need to get off their high horse and check out some of the alternative models before they go dissing something they haven't taken the time to understand.

Alright, so I admit it was a little harshly worded (my friend Kevin snidely referred to it as "a conversation between the self-righteous farm boy and the self-righteous vegan.") I was hoping to stir up a bunch of controversy in a community that prides itself on being different than everyone else and usually responds well to aggressive arguments. But this is such a tangled and complex and heartfelt issue that I apologize to anyone who ended up all messed up by my words and didn't feel comfortable responding to me personally for one reason or another. I do think it's really important for the animal rights activists to question the basis of their ideology and be tolerant of people who think differently or people who come from less privileged backgrounds than themselves.

That being said, when it comes down to it, I think being conscious of where your food is coming from, any way you look at it, is step in the right direction. For people who live in urban areas and aren't around their food as its growing and being raised, it does seem pretty appropriate to eat low on the food chain. The alternatives are out there. The reality is we live in a meat culture, most people in our country are totally addicted to subsidized factory farm chemical meat and it is truly disgusting. All those statistics about the rain forests and cattle grazing and grain production for livestock are actually true and

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